

An aerial photograph of downtown Rochester, New York, showing a dense grid of buildings and streets. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text "downtown rochester today" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image.

downtown rochester today



History

Since it was first established in the mid 1800s, Rochester has been a center for agriculture and medicine in the Minnesota region and has continued to evolve ever since. Rochester is Minnesota's third largest city and is home to leading medical, technology, and educational institutions, including the Mayo Clinic and one of IBM's largest development facilities. It was founded along the Zumbro River in 1854 by George Head, and grew exponentially in its early years with the population jumping steeply from 50 people in 1856 to 1,500 by 1858. It was named the county seat of Olmsted County in 1857 and was a major stagecoach stop between St. Paul, Minnesota and Dubuque, Iowa.

Rochester's position along important transportation routes was reinforced with the arrival of the railroad in the late 1860s, and by 1870 the town had reached a population of approximately 4,000. The railroad brought both immigrants and business opportunities to the city, which soon developed a grain market recognized by the Minneapolis and Chicago exchanges. This early agricultural economy has carried through to the present day with the presence of Seneca Foods and dairy producers such as Kemps, though agriculture has long been eclipsed by the medical and technology institutions that are now the basis of Rochester's economy.

Rochester's development has been intertwined with medicine since 1863, when Dr. William W. Mayo arrived to serve as an examining surgeon for Civil War draftees. Within a couple of decades, the Sisters of St. Francis had raised \$60,000 to open Saint Marys Hospital, which remains to the west of downtown. Now, the Mayo Clinic is Rochester's dominant employer, with 32,000 people working for the organization, over half in a number of facilities downtown. Mayo's international reputation for high-caliber care draws approximately 2 million visitors annually, and it remains the world's first and largest integrated medical practice.

Beyond medical facilities, Rochester has housed one of IBM's largest development centers since 1956. The company employs about 4,000 people, predominantly on their campus north of downtown. There are also a number of educational institutions in the area, including the recently-established University of Minnesota Rochester with its downtown campus. The combination of economic opportunity and high quality of life mean the city is frequently listed as one of the best places to live in the nation—a quality this downtown plan will only enhance.

Major Downtown Players and Current Efforts

The master plan represents a unique, historic and collaborative effort among multiple Rochester partners. The City, the University of Minnesota Rochester, and Mayo Clinic have joined efforts on the plan to ensure that the future initiatives of each party are coordinated and support each other. These three main partners are supported by other downtown initiatives and active groups including the Rochester Area Foundation, Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA), and Destination Medical Community. Sasaki led the team providing planning, urban design, transportation planning, and public engagement, and was joined by Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.) with expertise in market analysis, strategic planning, organization and finance; and by AECOM Ellerbe Beckett, providing architectural services and institutional knowledge about the Mayo master planning process. At the same time, the City engaged Nelson\Nygaard to complete a comprehensive mobility study, focused on increasing accessibility, managing growth and demand, increasing multi-modal options, and improving the pedestrian experience, which has been integrated with the Downtown Master Plan both in process and in recommendations.

City of Rochester

Well before initiating this hallmark master planning effort, the City of Rochester has been making active strides toward guiding development within the Downtown toward a more walkable, vibrant, downtown destination. This 2010 master plan follows the City's 2004 Downtown Plan, which recommended four distinct development districts within the Downtown. Many of the 2004 plan's recommendation have been successfully implemented, including the transformation of the University Square mall into a thriving mixed-use retail environment, with the University of Minnesota Rochester on the upper levels; formation of the RDA, establishment of a tax abatement district, investments in Peace Plaza, and an active events calendar.

This master plan was also developed in response to other recent City initiatives including design guidelines to promote sensitively-scaled development and walkable urbanism within the Urban Village zone at the northern edge of Soldier's Memorial Field. A Rochester Downtown Bicycling Plan is also in place, and plans for an arts district within the downtown are under development to capture the energy of the Mayo Civic Center and the many fine and performing arts organizations that are active in Rochester. Rochester's recent pioneering accomplishments also include being the first Minnesota city to adopt a complete streets policy and the second to achieve a Bicycle Friendly Community designation.

In addition to City planning initiatives, a number of development projects have been gaining momentum within the downtown. Several housing projects and future proposals have been testing new mixed use typologies and public-private partnerships to bring new housing choices to the downtown. Additionally, planning and design is complete for a major expansion of the Mayo Civic Center that will significantly increase the Center's capacity to host larger regional and national level events. Likewise, the City and other partners have already invested in significant infrastructure and streetscape improvements that will pave the way for a better pedestrian experience and quality development. Both the 2nd Street Transit Corridor and 1st Street promenade improvements are examples of the City's commitment to developing a vibrant, welcoming street-level experience within the downtown core.

University of Minnesota Rochester

With the University of Minnesota Rochester's recent announcement of a plan for a compact campus downtown, the 2010 master plan was initiated at an opportune moment for the City to reflect on the future of its downtown and capitalize on the development that the institutional presence can spur. Since 2005, the University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR) has been making increasing commitments to develop its presence downtown. Following expressed support from the City as well as the Minnesota Governor and State legislature in 2005, UMR established its first downtown location in the upper floors of the University Square shopping mall in 2007. This site provided beneficial adjacencies with the Mayo Clinic and the two institutions jointly agreed to work together and guide future educational and research collaborations.

In 2007, UMR undertook an official master plan study to investigate the scale of growth, academic vision, and potential sites for a broader physical campus. Similar to the collaborative spirit of this 2010 downtown plan, the UMR plan represented a combined effort of the University, Mayo Clinic, IBM, the City of Rochester, Olmsted County, and representatives of the City's business community. The academic curriculum builds on the local strengths and partnership opportunities in the health sciences. This effort recommended that a future UMR campus be sited downtown, proximate to Mayo Clinic Rochester and to Rochester's Civic Center, the Zumbro River, and the downtown core in order to leverage non-university facilities that would benefit the wider City community.

UMR committed to a vision of a downtown campus that would house core academic and administrative activities on a site immediately north of Soldier's Memorial Field Park, anchoring the southern end of an envisioned 1st Avenue mixed use corridor. Additional UMR uses such as student housing, research, recreation, and student services would be distributed in walking distance and contained within the urban fabric, contributing new development opportunities in the urban village area. Although UMR currently enrolls approximately 400 students, the plan explores expansion of campus enrollment to 1,500 students in the short-term, with potential growth to 5,000. This growth will infuse the downtown with a new demographic, from students to faculty and staff, with increased interest in downtown housing, restaurants and retail, and a lively, vibrant 24/7 downtown.

Mayo Clinic

Mayo Clinic has been a critical downtown partner since its inception in the late nineteenth century, and its presence in the core continues to shape the City and generate much of its economic activity. Whether it is as a patient, visitor, employee, or neighbor, the Mayo Clinic touches the daily lives of nearly all users of downtown Rochester. The Mayo Clinic joined this planning process as an equal partner, and the plan balances the Clinic's future growth needs with needs of the residents and other downtown uses.

Over the past twenty-five years, Mayo's size, both in population and facilities, has doubled making it one of the most significant uses downtown. Mayo's own current growth plan envisions a ten to twenty five year time horizon where growth will follow a similar pattern to Mayo's historic evolution. It is expected that this expansion will happen both within and outside downtown, with non-essential functions relocating out of downtown and key growth areas to the south and west. In tandem with this change, Mayo is focused on critical transportation solutions for staff and patients. Concurrent with this Downtown Master Plan, Mayo is also updating their five year plan, which includes updates to the Medical Institutional Special Planning District.

Rochester Downtown Alliance

The Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA) has been a key partner in Rochester's recent downtown, business, and economic development successes. Formed in 2005 as a public/private partnership, it serves as a nonprofit corporation composed of a wide range of people representing property owners, business leaders, the City and others. The RDA is responsible for putting on many events throughout the Downtown and communicating information about Downtown Rochester to residents and visitors alike.

Rochester Area Foundation

Founded in 1944, the Rochester Area Foundation nurtures a mission to "strengthen community philanthropy by promoting responsible and informed giving and to assist donors in meeting their charitable objectives." The Foundation supports this mission through grants to promote arts and culture, community development, education, human services and recreation. Its goal of promoting improved quality of life within Rochester aligns directly with the Master Plan's intent and the Foundation has been an active partner in developing the master plan.

Destination Medical Community

With the goal of achieving the world's premier destination medical community, this project promotes the idea of the community working together to provide the ideal patient and visitor experience. The objective is to initiate a

Plan Objectives

The following plan objectives were identified at the beginning of the process to guide the plan for future growth and development in the downtown area, the City's long-term interests, and private sector benefits.

- Create a **vision and development framework** to help **guide the growth** and vitality of Downtown Rochester over the next 20 years.
- Anticipate and capitalize on the opportunities created by the expansion of the **Mayo Clinic** and **University of Minnesota Rochester**
- Create **balanced transportation options** that provide **access** to downtown businesses and jobs.
- Identify **opportunity sites** for commercial development, housing, open space, civic amenities and new activities.
- Improve **connectivity** within downtown and thoughtfully **connect downtown to its adjacent neighborhoods**.
- Strengthen **public/private partnership** approaches to guide and jump start **implementation**.
- Support the **Destination Medical Community** goal to provide an ideal experience for patients and visitors.
- Determine the **sustainable development levels** for the downtown.

strategic vision for Rochester as a destination. This effort will support the efforts of Downtown Master Planning to create a strategy to enhance Rochester's development as a vibrant community and Mayo Clinic Rochester's continuing efforts to differentiate itself as the world-wide leader in integrated, multi-disciplinary medical practice, education and research. The evolution of Rochester will become an increasingly important factor in the "destination" experience of traveling to Rochester for the most sophisticated medical care in the world.

Community Engagement

The Master Plan has been an important opportunity to engage the broad Rochester community in defining issues, developing alternatives and coming together around a shared vision and implementation strategy. Community engagement has been a critical element of the planning process. The planning process was set up to have ongoing engagement with key downtown stakeholders through a series of community forums to gather information and discuss possibilities. The downtown stakeholders were wide ranging and encompassed key partners, both daytime and full-time residents, and investors. A Steering Committee formed of a broad range of representatives from Mayo, the City, and UMR, as well as other key stakeholders, were involved throughout the process. They offered high level oversight, local expertise and feedback to the plan through active engagement at committee meetings and worksessions.

A Technical Team composed of key staff from the City, UMR, and Mayo as well as Olmsted County, the Rochester Downtown Alliance, and RAEDI provided technical resources to the advancement of the project and ongoing review of plan development.

The process began in November 2009 when the Sasaki team engaged in conversations with a number of focus groups, including local institutions, major employers, property owners, developers, local banks, residents, arts and cultural advocates, and restaurant and retail owners. In January 2010, the planning team returned to hold an open house to review the downtown analysis and urban framework, and discuss potential alternatives for Downtown with the community. Throughout the evening, 125 people listened to a presentation of Downtown Rochester's existing market, mobility, and urban design conditions. They took part in interactive discussions about issues including downtown housing and urban neighborhoods, downtown activities, arts and tourism, business development, urban design, open space, historic preservation, mobility, and a destination medical community. Building upon this community input, a second open house in April 2010 provided further refinement to a preferred plan for downtown growth, as well as development of the mobility and open space strategies that will provide a framework for the development. Over 125 people attended this meeting and provided feedback to shape the plan. Community members also provided input on preliminary implementation strategies. In June 2010, the final downtown plan, mobility plan, and implementation strategy were presented at a final community wide open house.



Planning Context: Urban Analysis

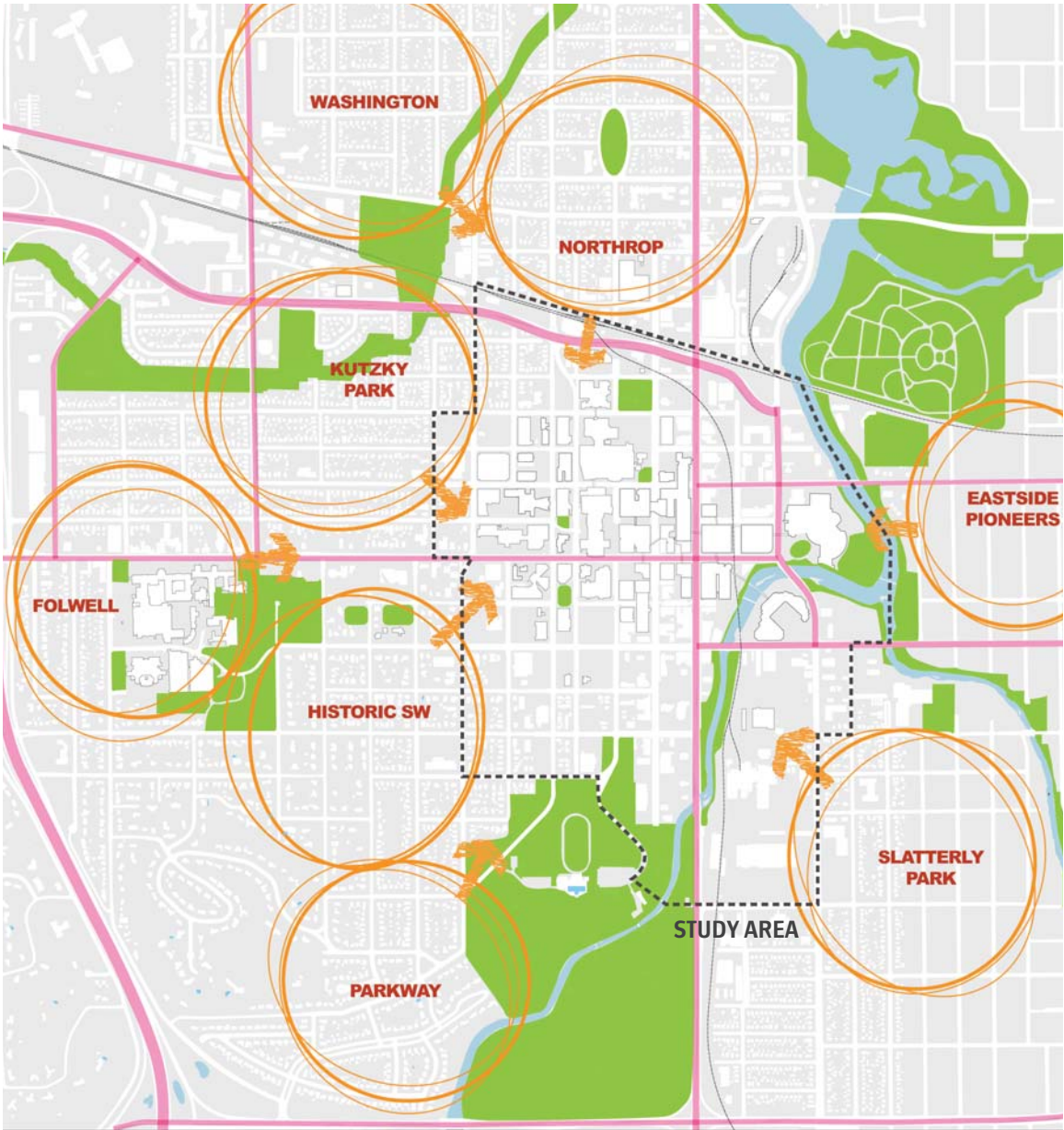
Downtown Rochester has a unique urban form and land development pattern. It has evolved over time concurrent to the development and expansion of its largest downtown tenant, the Mayo Clinic. The core of the downtown is characterized by dense tower buildings, with lower scale development radiating outward toward the Zumbro River and the surrounding single-family neighborhoods that ring the downtown in all directions. The key ideas shaping downtown’s character can be understood through analysis of six topics:

- Context and Connections
- Livable City
- Quality of Place
- Micro-Climate
- Points of Engagement
- Capacity for Growth



Context and Connections

With both scale and land-use differences between the downtown and the distinct neighborhoods surrounding it, the issue of how Downtown Rochester connects to its surrounding context is a critical one for the master plan. The Downtown is traversed by a network of major connective streets that reach beyond its core, including 2nd Street that provides a critical connection from Downtown to Saint Marys hospital, Civic Center Drive, Broadway, and portions of 4th Street SE, East Center Street, and 11th Avenue SW. U.S. Route 52, which was recently expanded to six lanes in Rochester, runs north-south one mile west of Downtown, and Broadway/U.S. Route 63 penetrates the core of downtown, running north-south alongside the Zumbro River. The City’s generous open space system is another asset that can serve to link and transition the downtown to neighborhoods beyond. Downtown’s parks—from the smaller scale downtown pocket parks to the community-scale Soldier’s Memorial Field—and the Zumbro River provide open space connections. Trails are integrated with many of the open spaces, such as the riverside trails and within Kutzky Park. Low density neighborhoods ring Downtown in all directions, contrasting with the high density commercial and employment core. While the neighborhoods often have strong neighborhood identities and many have high rates of home ownership, the fringe areas between Downtown and these outer residential zones often exhibit a pattern of development, including many blocks of surface parking lots, which does not provide either a gentle transition from Downtown or a strong edge.



Livable City

Rochester’s unique economic position enables it to attract global talent and visitors, but it must also ensure that downtown possesses the amenities that will keep people there. Downtown is home to a density of research, medical, and education uses that, together, can produce key synergies to inspire innovation and a persistently healthy economy.

While these uses are most densely clustered around the downtown core at 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue, the City is also home to several large civic and cultural uses, which are largely located at the Zumbro River bend near 2nd Street, flanking both sides of the River. Within this framework of employment, educational, civic, and cultural uses, a dispersed pattern of neighborhood and downtown services is distributed along key corridors. Many hotels are located on Broadway, while a fine-grained mix of uses, including retail, restaurants and recreation populate the 1st Avenue corridor that defines the start of an Urban Village district and reach from Center Street down to 3rd Street Southwest.



ACTIVE STREET LEVEL RETAIL ALONG 3RD STREET SW



LAND USE

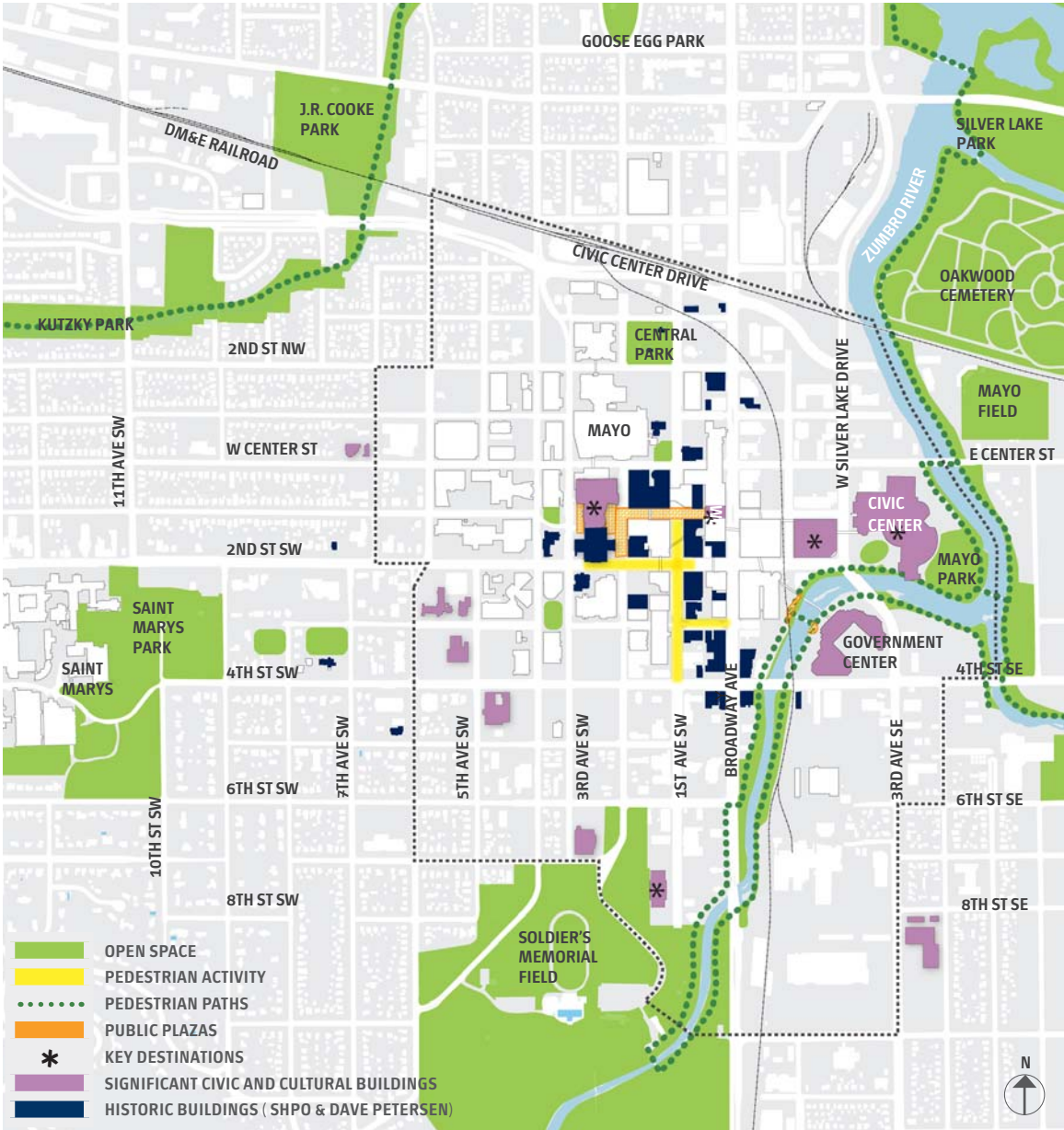
Quality of Place

The unique qualities of place that define Rochester’s Downtown are composed of a series of memorable, landmark buildings, a network of bike paths and trails that lead users through the City north-south along the River, and a tight zone of walkable, protected streets and plazas where the streetscape and intensity of pedestrian activity combine to activate the street and lend a specific urban quality to these blocks that is not found throughout all of Downtown. This pedestrian zone centers on 2nd Avenue and 2nd Street, and includes the area along 2nd Street in front of the historic Plummer Building. It also extends south along 1st Avenue to approximately 4th Street. The success of the recently expanded Peace Plaza is at the heart of this zone, reinforcing the importance of dedicated public, open spaces within the most densely built downtown zones.

Rochester is fortunate to have many intact historic structures within the downtown, which lend a specific character to its streets and an appropriate, walkable scale. These historic structures, together with all of the features that comprise Rochester’s unique character, should be protected and enhanced in future development decisions.



THE EXPANDED PEACE PLAZA



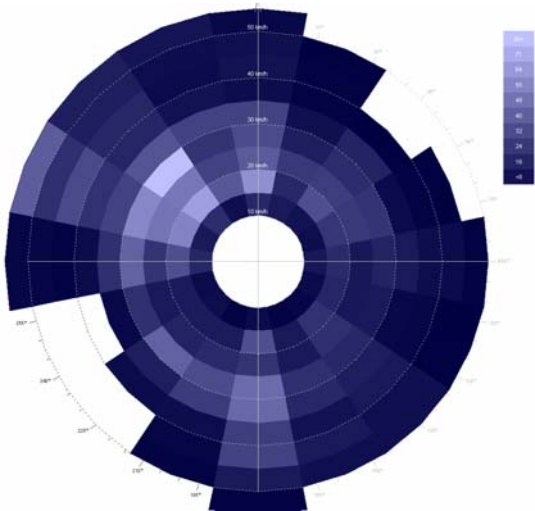
QUALITY OF PLACE IS DEFINED BY LANDMARK BUILDINGS AND PUBLIC SPACE

Micro-Climate

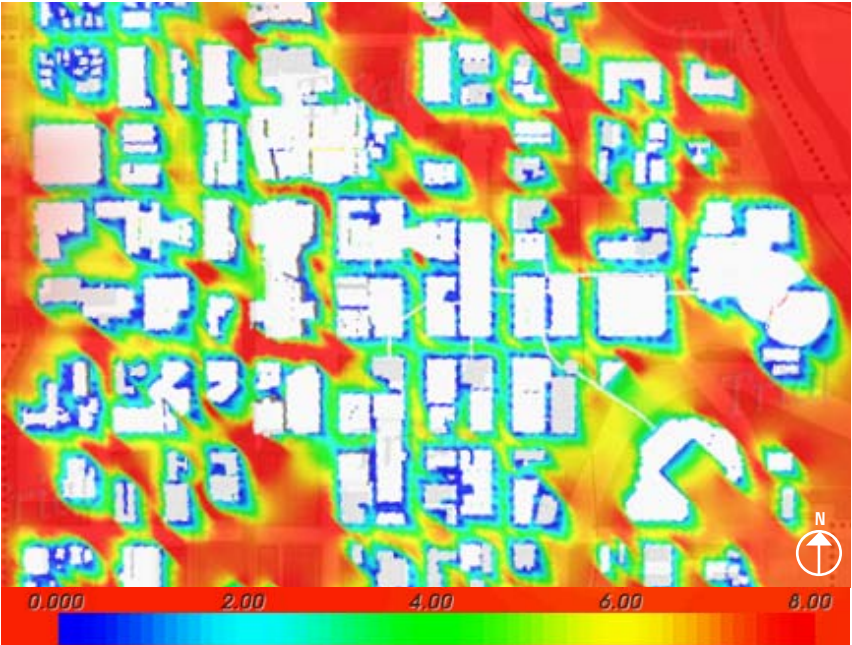
Rochester’s continental northern climate presents challenges to the design and use of Downtown streets, plazas, and parks and open spaces. Looking ahead, future development and urban design can employ strategies to create more comfortable winter environments. Urban form within the master plan is carefully considered to mitigate wind tunnels, and temper Rochester’s higher than average wind speeds. Similarly, the densely built downtown—with many towers within the Mayo core district – can exacerbate perceptions of cold by creating shade in public plazas and streets. Future development should carefully consider the unique challenges of Rochester’s climate, orienting buildings to maximize solar gain and minimize shade impacts.

Capacity for Growth

Although much of the Downtown core is built up to a high density, areas of underdeveloped capacity exist, both within the core and particularly in the fringe areas immediately surrounding it. Future development must consider both what the appropriate density is for difference areas and where and how much the Downtown can grow within these growth areas. The master plan identified surface lots on the fringe of downtown, as well as sites for redevelopment with higher density uses over the long-term implementation of the plan. Surface lots to the south and west of the downtown are key opportunities for full block infill development. Similarly, over the long-term, if land becomes available east of the river, this can be a site for additional growth of the downtown that transitions to the adjacent neighborhoods.



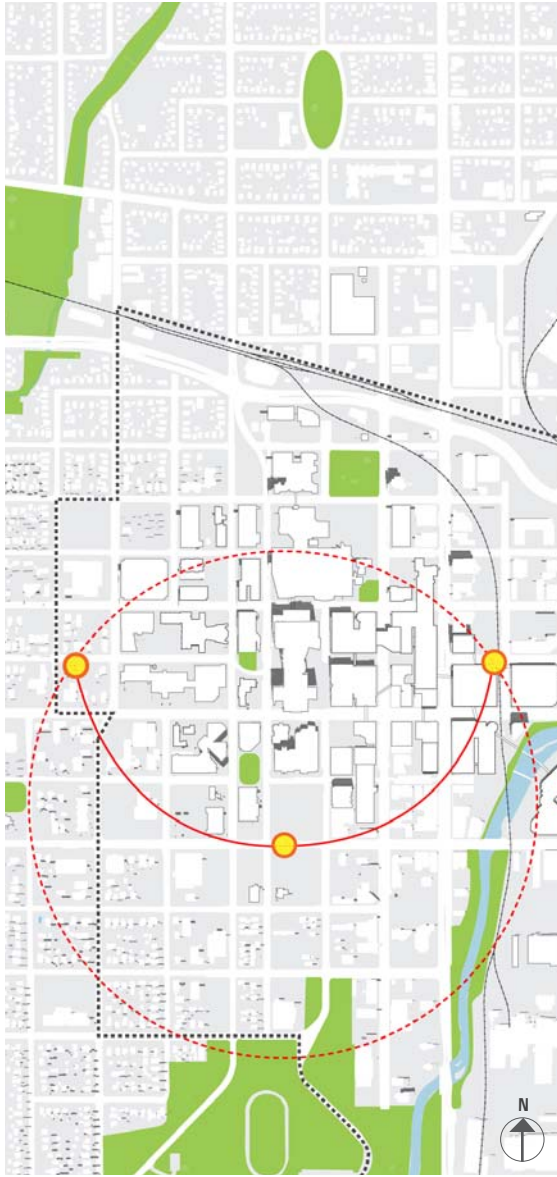
PREVAILING WINTER WINDS ARE FROM THE NORTHWEST



WINTER WIND CONDITIONS



PEDESTRIANS BRAVE ROCHESTER WINTERS



SUN AND SHADOW: JUNE 21, 12 PM



SEPTEMBER/MARCH 21, 12 PM



DECEMBER 21, 12 PM

◀ A STUDY OF SUN AND SHADOW CONDITIONS SHOWS THE IMPACT OF DOWNTOWN'S TOWERS ON THE COMFORT OF THE STREETS AND OPEN SPACES YEAR-ROUND

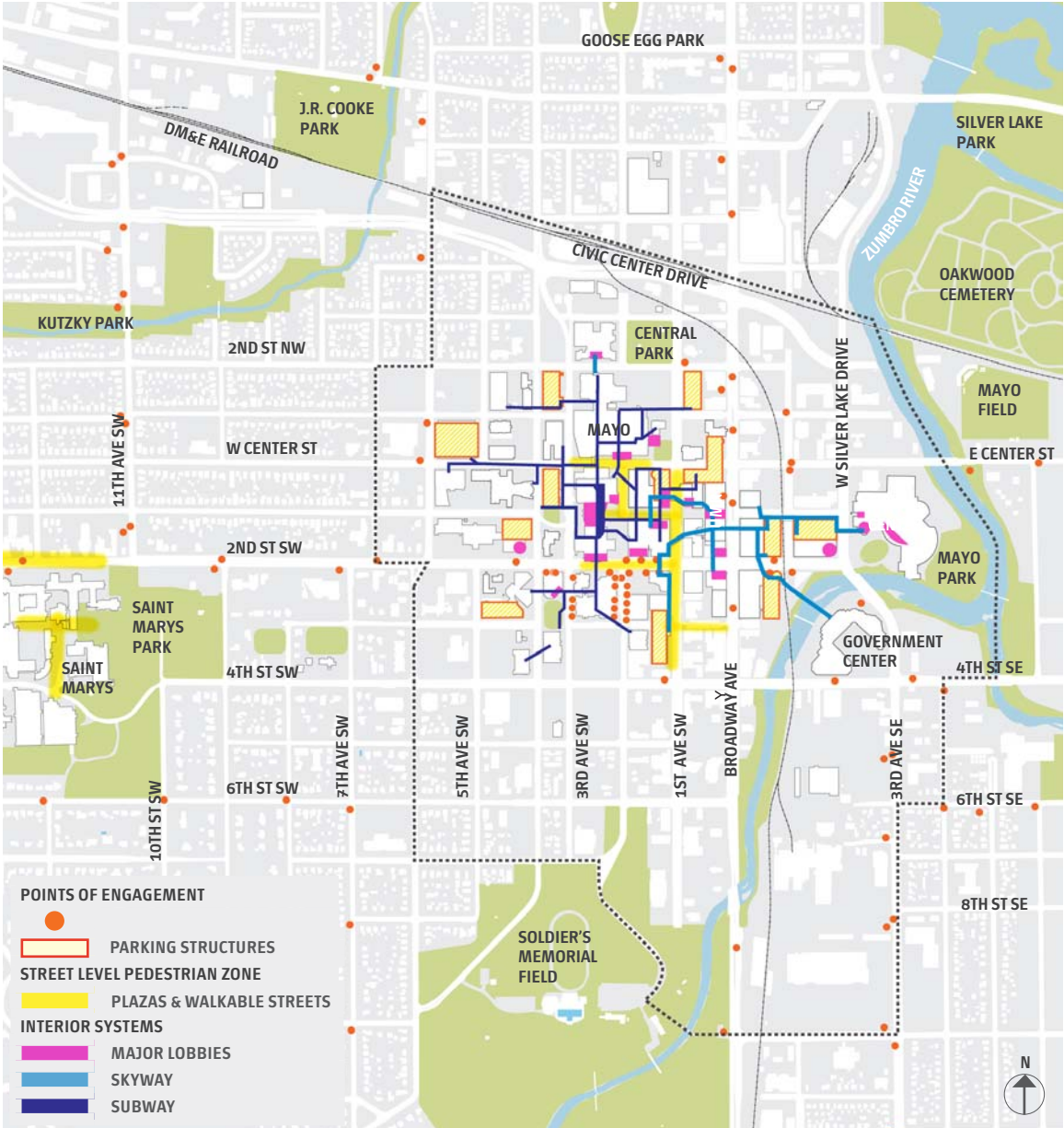
Points of Engagement

Downtown Rochester’s multi-level system of both horizontal and vertical circulation presents both opportunities and challenges for creating points of engagement, among different users of downtown in the Downtown. A combination of the cold Minnesota climate and the operational needs of a medical center have resulted in the proliferation of a subway and skyway system throughout the downtown core. While this system of underground tunnels and above grade enclosed bridges offers pedestrians shelter from an often harsh climate and from difficult or congested street crossings, it also has the unfortunate side effect of drawing energy and vitality from the exterior street level, a zone that – in most cities – is the main opportunity for the chance encounters that lend excitement and interest to the urban experience.

Still, a tight zone of walkable streets and vibrant plazas has persisted in downtown, largely due to targeted street investments on certain blocks, a high intensity of uses and employees located within the core, and the location of bus stops, major lobbies and strategic entries/exits from buildings, parking garages, and the subway/skyway system. At street level, the area immediately around the Peace Plaza and around the 2nd Street and 2nd Avenue transit zone forms the core of this walkable pedestrian zone, which also extends along 1st Avenue from approximately Center Street down to 4th Street. Sites where the street, subway/skyway system, garage entries, and lobbies intersect can be seen in the map at right, and offer key points of engagement where multiple users can interact.



SKYBRIDGE OVER 2ND STREET



POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT

Mobility Analysis

For a mid-sized city with just over 100,000 residents, Downtown Rochester experiences urban transportation challenges typical of much larger cities. This is due to the dense concentration of employment and visitor activity created by the Mayo Clinic. Downtown parking and access demand is high, particularly for employees and visitors; peak hour traffic volumes are high, particularly at key arterial portals; and transit is a well used access mode, delivering over 10 percent of local and regional commuters to downtown. The dominance of a single major landholder and employer, the Mayo Clinic, presents opportunities to manage travel demand afforded to few cities. Even in the last five to ten years, aggressive programs by the Mayo Clinic to subsidize transit access have increased transit use and reduced drive-alone travel by employees.

A Comprehensive Approach to Transportation

It is likely that many residents in Rochester feel that the City’s transportation system already meets their daily needs adequately. They may wonder, “Why does Downtown Rochester need a multimodal transportation plan and strategy?” Streets typically make up 30% to 40% of a city and are one of Rochester’s most utilized and most critical public assets. How the competing demands on those assets are balanced will shape downtown growth and could impact Rochester’s economic competitiveness in an increasingly global economic environment. Particular themes that arose during the planning process and were used to guide access and mobility recommendations include:

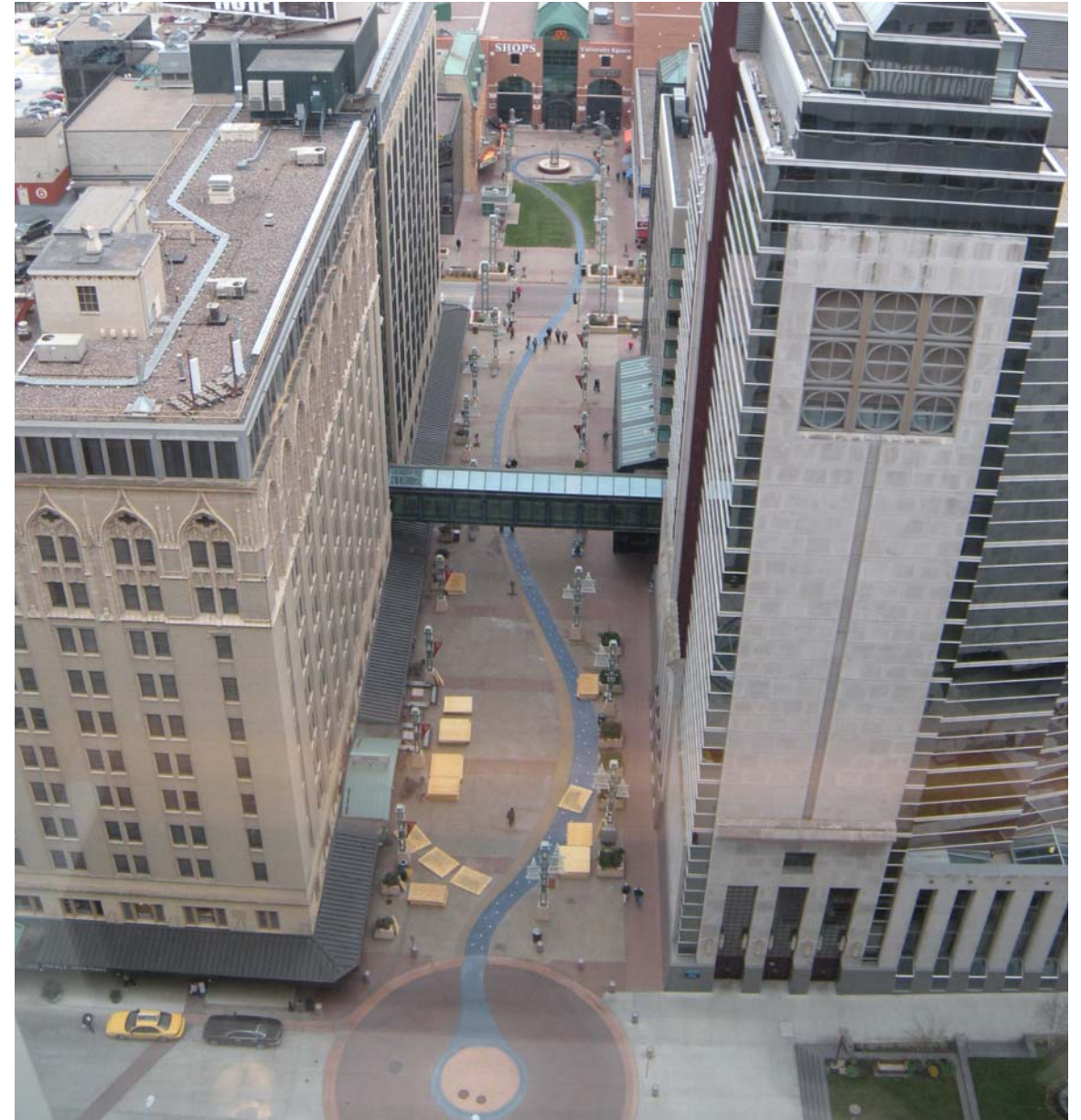


STREETS, SIDEWALKS AND PARKING CURRENTLY CONSUME OVER 50% OF DOWNTOWN REAL ESTATE

Mobility Guiding Principles

Developing a set of guiding principles for mobility requires us to think broadly about the factors that will influence future transportation investments.

- **People desire transportation options and connections.** As fuel costs have risen in recent years and speculation about peak oil has come to the nation's attention, there is an increasing realization that auto dominated transportation systems are not sustainable. Furthermore, as people try out more active forms of transportation, such as bicycling, they are realizing the health and well-being benefits of active transportation and are demanding safe and comprehensive non-motorized facilities.
- **Economic competitiveness relies on diverse and safe transportation options.** Across the United States there is an increasing race to attract young and educated citizens, often dubbed the "creative class," who are seen as the future leaders of economic and civic institutions. Research shows that these people like active streets and vital neighborhoods. New companies or families looking to relocate pay great attention to a community's civic center, recreation opportunities such as trails, transportation options including transit as well as congestion and opportunities for goods movement. Transportation is vital to Rochester's continued economic success.
- **Rapidly emerging evidence of escalating global climate change will introduce new economic and social practices.** Transportation accounts for roughly 30% of our greenhouse gas emissions (nationally) and any solution will require change not only in fuel efficiency and energy sources, but also how we travel and how we organize our lives. As is evidenced in some states already, a community or region's approach to reducing its carbon footprint may become an important criterion for transportation and other types of infrastructure funding.
- **Our country is having a public health crisis and how we get around has a major influence on our physical health and well being.** Furthermore, a healthy citizenry reduces government costs, ensures our children grow up active and motivated and increases productivity in many areas. Safe and inviting streets and pathways are essential to encouraging active lifestyles and giving Rochester residents opportunities for recreation and to enjoy the outdoors. The tie to public health is particularly relevant in Rochester given the economic focus on health care provision, education and research.



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE PEACE PLAZA

Based on these factors, the following mobility objectives have been developed for the Downtown Master Plan:

- Facilitate the ongoing development of downtown by ensuring access for employees, residents, visitors and customers.
- Increase modal options for people traveling to and within downtown
- Improve connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods and within downtown
- Increase transit capacity while reducing negative impacts on street life
- Ensure all street users feel and are safe
- Improve connections between transportation modes and systems
- Enhance transportation systems user comprehension, particularly at connection points
- Reduce environmental impacts of transportation infrastructure and operations



MAKING TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS IN SAFE AND INVITING STREETS FOR ALL MODES CAN HELP PROMOTE AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

Mobility Challenges and Opportunities

Access

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
Meeting projected 20 year access demand at current mode split could require 5 city blocks covered with 7 story parking ramps	Excellent commuter transit system in place with employees accustomed to riding the bus
Limited ability to expand or create new traffic corridors for auto access into downtown, limiting ability to manage increased auto traffic as jobs and services grow	Flat terrain and a grid street system are good for building a great cycling network
Transit system will need to carry 25,000 more daily riders by 2030 to meet mode split goals, requiring more space for vehicles and passenger loading	A local fixed rail streetcar tied to key downtown land uses, neighborhoods and remote parking could change intra-downtown mobility

Connectivity

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
Limited street crossings of the Zumbro River put significant demand on Center Street and 4th Street	New dedicated facilities for non-motorized users crossing the Zumbro River (i.e., bike lanes on 4th street, new 6th street crossing with sidewalk and bike lanes) could increase mode split
Broadway is a real and perceived barrier to east-west pedestrians’ travel at street level	Excellent existing multi-use trail system could be better utilized with enhanced bicycle and pedestrian facilities connections to downtown core
Civic Center Drive is a barrier to non-motorized users entering or exiting downtown to the north	Improved pedestrian conditions on Broadway could knit together east and west downtown
Multiple level pedestrian system is a challenge for wayfinding	



PARKING FACILITIES REQUIRED FOR AUTO ACCESS TRIPS CONSUME LAND, CREATE BLANK STREET FACADES AND CREATE PEDESTRIAN CONFLICTS AT ENTRANCES



CENTER STREET IS ONE OF JUST TWO MAJOR ACCESS STREETS TO DOWNTOWN FROM THE EAST, BUT THERE IS NO DEDICATED SPACE FOR BICYCLES TO TRAVEL



WIDE STREET RIGHTS-OF-WAY WITH NO CENTER REFUGE CREATE INTIMIDATING CROSSINGS FOR PEDESTRIANS (CIVIC CENTER DRIVE)

Quality

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
Lack of street trees creates hardscape feel to downtown	Trees and landscaping could improve quality of pedestrian environment
Investments in skywalk system take energy and investment priority from streetscape	Strategic expansions to the skyway system can provide climate controlled connections between parking and key destinations
Extent of downtown parking creates many pedestrian and traffic conflicts on sidewalks	Green street features can reduce environmental impacts of streets and soften physical environment
Traffic volumes on Broadway, 2nd Street and 4th Street create safety issues and reduce pedestrians' sense of security	

